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ABSTRACT

This policy brief contains papers from participants in a symposium that examined the movement of high-school students from school to college or work. The presenters adopted a variety of perspectives to study these transitions so as to aid state policymakers, state education and higher education agency personnel, and postsecondary and secondary administrators and faculty. It outlines and analyzes current efforts, as well as research opportunities and challenges. It focuses on the disconnection between K-12 and postsecondary education systems and how this disconnection undermines student aspirations. Special attention is given to the findings of the Knowledge and Skills for University Success content standards and how these should be used in K-12 education. It also describes the American Diploma Project, a program that fosters efforts to make American high-school diplomas more consistently meaningful across states, resulting in better-prepared college students. Ways to promote successful transitions for secondary/postsecondary students are likewise discussed, along with examples of successful transitions and "blended institutions," those schools that combine secondary and postsecondary learning. Finally, it describes the Pathways to College Network, which promotes the preparation, access, and success of underserved populations who seek a college education. (Contains 21 references.) (RJM)

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High School Transitions: State of the Art and Views of the Future.

David T. Conley
Andrea Venezia

April 24, 2003

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High School Transitions

State of the Art and Views of the Future

David T. Conley, Ph.D.
Andrea Venezia, Ph.D.

AERA Symposium
Thursday, April 24 2003
Chicago, IL

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Introduction

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This policy brief contains papers from participants in a symposium conducted at the American Educational Research Association's annual meeting in Chicago, Illinois on April 23, 2003. The panelists in this symposium examined the issue of transitions, the movement of high school students from school to college or work, from a variety of perspectives. The objective of the symposium was to review the state of the art in this policy area and to consider what effective educational policy and programs in this area could and should look like. This publication is designed for use by state policymakers, state education and higher education agency personnel, and postsecondary and secondary administrators and faculty. It outlines and analyzes current efforts, as well as research opportunities and challenges. This review and analysis is designed to help advance policy and program work in this area and to spark both policy development and academic inquiry on the topics of transitions from high school.

Why is this Issue Important Today?

K-12 education standards are established in nearly every state in the nation. Almost all states also have concomitant assessments, many of which are high stakes in nature. These powerful policy levers are having effects on public schools throughout the nation. However, in very few cases do the standards and assessments connect systematically or systemically with post-high school options, such as college and work. This creates a fundamental problem for students who gear their efforts to doing well on state tests based on standards that may or may not be preparing them for life after high school. It also poses problems for high schools that are judged on both their students' performance on the K-12 assessments and on the proportion of students who attend college. Additionally, many states are becoming concerned about the remediation rate of college students who should be fully qualified for postsecondary work. These mismatches between the expectations of the secondary, the postsecondary system, and the work world are beginning to put strains on high schools and on state education reform policies. In Michigan, for example, parents of some students who scored well on the ACT refused to let them take the state K-12 exam for fear lower scores on the exam might affect their children's chances for college admission. The state then created a scholarship program to entice students to take the state test. In New York, parents in some communities have kept their children home on test day as a form of protest based on their belief that new requirements that link the Regents exams with high school diplomas result in a less challenging curriculum. In Oregon, the state's education agencies have developed a coordinated system that allows results from the state's 10th grade tests to be incorporated into admissions decisions and made available to prospective employers. In the absence of policies that promote successful student transitions, standards-based high school reform will be extremely difficult to achieve or become excessively narrow in scope.

Understanding how high schools can connect with postsecondary education and the work world is a high priority in the overall improvement of public education.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This symposium's conceptual and theoretical underpinnings are anchored in two areas: signaling theory and policy coherence. Signaling theory presents the view that policies (e.g., high school exit exams and college entrance and placement exams) communicate signals, meaning, and expected behavior to students, secondary schools, and postsecondary institutions; and 2) policy coherence. Kirst (1997) argues that disconnects between K-12 assessments and postsecondary admission and placement policies contribute to K-16 transition difficulties for students. He and others (Bishop, 1996; Powell, 1996) contend that the lack of compatibility between K-12 and higher education policies and practices sends confusing signals to parents, students, and K-12 educators regarding successful transitions to college, leading to inadequate academic preparation and un-informed college preparatory processes. Policy coherence, as expressed by Fuhrman, Elmore, and others posit that schools function more effectively when they receive consistent policy messages from all external sources. If high schools in particular can align their programs with a consistent set of expectations and goals, policy coherence theories predict that they will function more effectively and produce better student learning outcomes.

The session was introduced and chaired by David Conley, symposium co-organizer. First, each panelist presented a brief summary of her or his work. This policy brief was then distributed to audience members. The following overarching themes served as the framework to which each panelist responded.

- How will your findings and activities affect national education policy in the area of high school transitions?
- In what ways does your work address equity, access, and quality issues?
- What are the most important policy actions states can take to promote better articulation between secondary and postsecondary systems and transitions to the work world?
- How will students benefit from the types of policy changes being suggested by panel members?
- What are the potential downsides of greater system alignment?
- Are current assessment methods adequate to achieve the goals of effective system alignment?
- What implications for postsecondary education do greater systems alignment have? How can higher education become a more involved player in this policy area?
- What are key areas where research needs to be initiated?

References can be found on page 34.

Betraying the College Dream

How Disconnected K-12 and Postsecondary Education Systems Undermine Student Aspirations [1]

Andrea Venezia, Ph.D.
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Stanford University

America's high school students have higher educational aspirations than ever before, yet these aspirations are being undermined by many systemic barriers. Eighty-eight percent of 8th graders expect to participate in some form of postsecondary education,[i] and approximately 70 percent of high school graduates actually do go to college within two years of graduating.[ii] These educational aspirations cut across racial and ethnic lines; as with the national sample cited above, eighty-eight percent of all students surveyed for this project intend to attend some form of postsecondary education. In each of the six states studied for this report (California, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Oregon, and Texas), over 80 percent of African American and Latino students surveyed plan to attend some form of postsecondary education.

Over the past few decades, parents, educators, policymakers, business leaders, community members, and researchers have told students that, in order to succeed in our society, they need to go to college. High school students have heard that message, and they are planning on attending college.

But states have created unnecessary and detrimental barriers between high school and college, barriers that are undermining these student aspirations. The current fractured systems send students, their parents, and K-12 educators conflicting and vague messages about what students need to know and be able to do to enter and succeed in college.

For example, this research found that high school assessments often stress different knowledge and skills than do college entrance and placement requirements. Similarly, the coursework between high school and college is not connected; students graduate from high school under one set of standards and, three months later, are required to meet a whole new set of standards in college. Current data systems are not equipped to address issues across systems. Most states are not able to identify students' needs as they transition from one education system to another, or assess outcomes from K-16 reforms, because they do not have K-16 data systems. Also, no one is held accountable for K-16 reform.

The Problems

Because of these kinds of problems,[2] many students and parents do not know what is expected of students when they enter college. Other major findings include:

- Inequalities in education systems. Since almost all students plan to attend college, and most do, it makes sense to help all students learn about their postsecondary options and prepare for college. There are, however, some deep inequalities throughout the systems in areas such as college counseling, college preparation course offerings, and connections with local postsecondary institutions. There is also an unequal distribution of such resources as college centers on high school campuses, opportunities to make college visits, and visits from college recruiters on high school campuses.

- Students who are in accelerated curricular tracks in high school receive clearer signals about college preparation than do their peers in other tracks. Many students in middle and lower level high school courses are not reached by postsecondary education outreach efforts, or by college counseling staff in their high schools. Many economically disadvantaged parents often lack experience and information concerning college preparation.

- Student knowledge of curricular requirements is sporadic and vague. Less than 12 percent of the students surveyed knew all the course requirements for the institutions studied. This ranged from one percent in California to 11 percent in Maryland. Students do appear to have considerable partial knowledge of curricular requirements; slightly more than one-half of the students knew three or more course requirements.

- Teachers play a major role in helping students prepare for college, yet they do not have the resources they need to give students accurate information. Teachers often took a greater role in helping students prepare for college than did counselors, but teachers lack connections with postsecondary institutions and up-to-date admission and placement information. Also, the teachers who were most active in helping students prepare for college are usually teachers of honors and college prep courses.

- Students are generally unaware of the content of postsecondary course placement exams. Across all the studied states, less than one-half of the sampled students knew the specific placement testing policies for the institutions in the study.

- The distribution of college preparation information to parents is inequitable. Forty-two percent, 44 percent, and 47 percent of economically disadvantaged parents in Illinois, Maryland, and Oregon, respectively, stated that they had received college information, as compared with 74 percent, 71 percent, and 66 percent of their more economically well-off counterparts.

The Solutions

Given these problems, what should we strive to change? Our research found that the following three areas are most promising for immediate reform:

- Provide all students, their parents, and educators with accurate, high quality, information about, and access to, courses that will help prepare students for college-level standards.

- Focus on the institutions that serve the majority of students. Shift media, policy, and research attention to include broad access colleges and universities attended by the vast majority of students (approximately 80 percent). Broad access colleges need the financial and policy attention of federal, state and other leaders. Increasing the rates of student success at these colleges is a sound public investment because it can have a tremendous impact on the civic and economic well-being of each state by improving people's economic security, increasing their civic participation, and increasing college completion rates for economically disadvantaged students and students of color.

- Create an awareness that getting into college is not the hardest part. Expand the focus of local, state, and federal programs from access to college to include success in college. Access to college is only half the picture. True college opportunity includes having a real chance to succeed in college—and it is time to focus policy attention on improving college success rates. High school course content, academic counseling, college outreach, and other programming needs to reflect this so that students are clear about what it takes to succeed in college, including community college.

The Methods

How can we achieve these ends? For a start, college stakeholders must be brought to the table when K-12 standards are developed. Likewise, K-12 educators must be engaged as postsecondary education admission and placement policies are under review. Reforms across the two education systems will be difficult if not impossible to implement without meaningful communication and policymaking between the levels.

There are several other important steps that states, K-12 schools and districts, postsecondary institutions and systems, and the federal government can take to improve the transition from high school to college for all students. These include:

- Ensuring that colleges and universities state, and publicize, their academic standards so that students, their parents, and educators have accurate college preparation information. This effort must go beyond targeted outreach, and fragmented categorical programs, to universal programs for all students. In addition, states should disseminate materials in languages other than English, depending on the language groups in their states.[iii]

- Examining the relationship between the content of postsecondary education placement exams and K-12 exit-level standards and assessments to determine if more compatibility is necessary and possible. K-12 standards and assessments that are aligned with postsecondary education standards and assessments can provide clear signals and incentives, if they are high quality standards and assessments. Assessments should be diagnostic in nature, and the results should include performance levels that indicate to students that their scores meet or exceed the level for college preparation and placement without remediation. Appropriate K-12 assessments could be used as an admission and placement factor by public postsecondary education institutions, although caution must be taken to ensure that 1) more than one measure of student preparation is used and 2) the stakes attached to K-12 assessments are not too high for students.

- Reviewing postsecondary education placement exams for reliability, validity, efficacy, and the extent to which they promote teaching for understanding. Data need to be maintained regarding the success of placement procedures.

- Allowing students to take placement exams in high school so that they can prepare, academically, for college and understand college-level expectations. These assessments should be diagnostic so that students, their parents, and teachers know how to improve students' preparation for college.

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- Sequencing undergraduate general education requirements so that appropriate senior-year courses are linked to postsecondary general education courses.[iv]

- Expanding successful dual or concurrent enrollment programs between high schools and colleges so that they include all students, not just traditionally "college-bound" students.

- Collecting, and connecting, data from all education sectors. This means that states and regions should create common identifier numbers for students and track teachers during preparation and professional development programs. Data should be tied to a K-16 accountability system. Postsecondary institutions and K-12 schools need assistance in learning how to use data to inform curricular and instruction policies and practices.

- Providing technical support to states by having the federal government establish voluntary data collection standards.

Expanding federal grants to stimulate more state-level K-16 policymaking. This could include funding activities such as: 1) collaborative discussions between K-12 and postsecondary education, with requirements for examining and improving particular issues (including the collection and use of data across the systems), and 2) joint development activities that enable students to transition successfully from one system to the next.

These recommendations will be easier to accomplish, and more effective in their implementation, if there is an overall organizational base within each state for K-16 policymaking and oversight. Having a K-16 entity within the state does not, however, ensure that innovative K-16 reforms will follow. Only a concerted effort by policymakers, educators, parents, and students will do the job. Implementing these recommendations will not magically eliminate the dozens of other reasons why students are not prepared adequately for college. But they are important steps toward developing a more equitable educational experience for all students, and providing all students with the preparation they need to succeed in college.

Discussion Questions

1. Given current inequalities in terms of students' opportunities to prepare well for college, how can high schools ensure that (almost) all students are ready for college if students enter high school with below grade-level knowledge and skills?

2. What is an appropriate role for the federal government in K-16 reform/college preparation?

3. How important is governance in developing, implementing, and sustaining these reforms?

4. We urge states to create comprehensive K-16 data systems. What types of data are already available in most states? (an assumption is that there are lots of data out there, but they are not organized or connected) What would it take to connect those data and use them to understand problems in the systems, student needs, etc.?

End Notes

i National Center for Education Statistics. 1996. *National Education Longitudinal study: 1988-1994. Descriptive Summary Report,* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

ii The Education Trust. Fall 1999. "Ticket to Nowhere. The Gap Between Leaving High School and Entering College and High Performance Jobs," in *Thinking* K-16, Vol. 3, Issue 2, Washington, DC: The Education Trust.

iii For more information and recommendations about Latino parents' knowledge of college preparation issues, see "College Knowledge: What Latino Parents Need to Know and Why They Don't Know It," by the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (www.trpi.org).

iv For additional information and recommendations regarding the senior year of high school, see "Overcoming the High School Senior Slump," by Michael W. Kirst at http://bridgeproject <http://www.stanford.edu/group/bridgeproject> .stanford.edu.

1. This is adapted from the final policy report of Stanford University's Bridge Project entitled, "Betraying the College Dream: How Disconnected Systems Undermine Student Aspirations," by Andrea Venezia, Michael W. Kirst, and Anthony L. Antonio.

2 There are many issues that affect student preparation for college. This research focuses solely on the role of policies and programs related to high school graduation, college admission, and college placement. We did not address issues related to financial aid or affordability. In addition, teacher preparation and professional development programs and policies play a major role in helping students transition successfully between high school and college. These issues warrant a separate study and, therefore, were not addressed by this project.

Talking Across the Divide

K-12 and Higher Education

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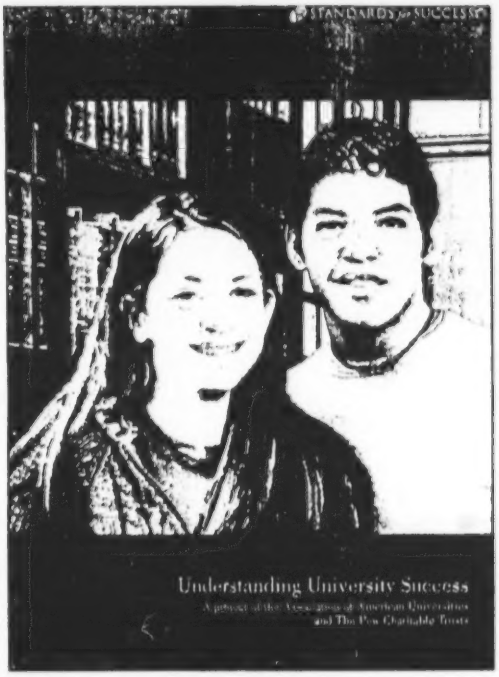
Many high school students prepare for college—but they are often surprised by the knowledge and skills expected from university professors. Standards for Success (S4S) offers college-readiness resources to assure that university bound students are prepared not just to go to college, but to succeed once they arrive there. Faculty members at universities of the Association of American Universities (AAU) are often perplexed by the lack of skills and knowledge of otherwise capable students enrolled in their freshman courses. Standards for Success establishes standards of knowledge and skill for success in such courses and offers a database of information on state K-12 assessments and standards to help students understand what universities expect and to aide professors and admissions officers in their understanding of what states expect their high school students to know.

Standards for Success, funded by AAU institutions and The Pew Charitable Trusts, comprises four components: Knowledge and Skills for University Success standards, University Work Samples, State High School Assessment Database and the State Exam Alignment Study.

Knowledge and Skills for University Success Standards

Knowledge and Skills for University Success standards are the result of a two-year study in which more than 400 faculty and staff members from twenty AAU research universities. These faculty members participated in extensive meetings and reviews designed to identify what students must do to succeed in entry-level courses at their institutions. "Success" as defined by these standards means the ability to do well enough in entry-level college courses in core academic areas to meet general education requirements and to continue on to major in a particular area. External experts were employed to analyze national academic content standards documents for comparison. Multiple peer reviews were employed to hone the standards and ensure their validity. The resulting statements represent the most comprehensive and thoroughly grounded set of standards for college success yet developed. The Knowledge and Skills for University Success (KSUS) standards have been licensed to the College Board and will serve as foundational elements in the development of upcoming versions of the PSAT and SAT tests and will be utilized to provide diagnostic feedback to test takers.

The faculty and staff members who participated in the process of developing these standards represent a wide range of academic viewpoints. One of the most dominant themes raised by participants is the importance of the habits of mind students develop in high school and bring with them to university studies. These habits are considered by many faculty members to be more important than specific content knowledge. The habits of mind include critical thinking, analytic thinking and problem solving; an inquisitive nature and interest in taking advantage of what a research university has to offer; the willingness to accept critical feedback and to adjust based on such feedback; openness to possible failures from time to time; and the ability and desire to cope with frustrating and ambiguous learning tasks. Other critical skills include the ability to express one's self in writing and orally in a clear and convincing fashion; to discern the relative importance and credibility of various sources of information; to draw inferences and reach conclusions independently; and to use technology as a tool to assist the learning process rather than as a crutch.



The specific content knowledge identified in the Knowledge and Skills for University Success should be considered in relation to these overarching attributes and skills. Understanding and mastery of the content knowledge specified here is achieved through the exercise of broader cognitive skills. It is not enough simply to know something; the learner must possess the ability to do something with that knowledge, whether it is to solve a problem, reach a conclusion or present a point of view. This plexus of content knowledge and cognitive skills is what an education at an American research university (and many other institutions of higher education) seeks to develop. "Success" as defined by these standards means the ability to do well enough in college entry-level core academic courses to meet general education requirements and to continue on to major in a particular area.

Success in a university is different from success in high school. Universities facilitate greater specialization than high schools. Therefore, some students may find that they are able to succeed in college even though their mastery in some areas of Knowledge and Skills for University Success is less well developed than in others. The more of the standards that a student has mastered, the more options the student will have and the more successful the student will be during the all-important initial year of college.

University Work Samples

If freshmen students are expected to write well and know common grammar, at what level of sophistication do faculty members expect these skills to be expressed in the first year of college study? Standards for Success researchers collected more than 250 work samples along with the course syllabi and assignment that corresponded with the student work sample. Each piece of work in this set of University Work Sample serves as an example of

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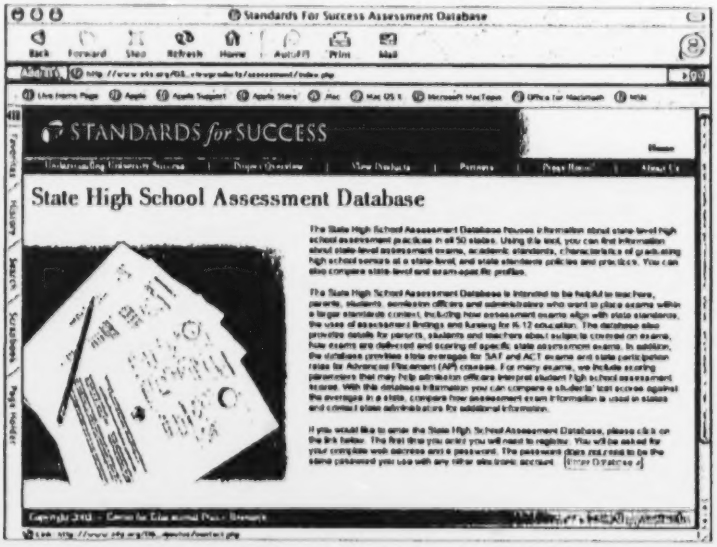
the level of quality expected in entry-level university courses. Such examples help students and high school teachers alike gauge the distance from high school learning to university expectations. These University Work Samples are available on the website (www.s4s.org) and on the CD-ROM available from Standards for Success. Work samples are available for English, mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, and second languages.

State High School Assessment Database

The State High School Assessment Database houses information about state-level high school assessment practices for all 50 states. The database contains information about state-level assessment exams, academic standards, characteristics of graduating high school seniors at a state-level, and assessment and standards web addresses. Database users can also compare state-level and exam-specific profiles.

The State High School Assessment Database is intended to be helpful to teachers, parents, students, admission officers and administrators who want to place exams within a larger standards context, including how assessment exams align with state standards, the uses of assessment findings and funding for K-12 education. The database also provides details for parents, students and teachers about subjects covered on exams, how exams are delivered and scoring of specific state assessment exams. In addition, the database provides state averages for SAT and ACT exams and state participation rates for Advanced Placement (AP) courses. For many exams, scoring parameters are included that may help admission officers interpret student high school assessment scores. With this database information the user can compare a students' test scores against the averages in a state, compare how assessment exam information is used in states and contact websites for additional information.

Several sources of data were used to develop the State High School Assessment Database. Perhaps the most important source were state web sites. All standards information and scoring data, in addition to other important variables, are taken from State Department of Education websites. Another important resource was the State Student Assessment Program Annual Survey conducted by the Council of Chief State School Officers. For states with exit exams, the State High School Exit Exams: A Baseline Report prepared by the Center on Education Policy was also utilized.



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Exam Alignment Study

As more and more states adopt academic content standards and accompanying assessment systems, the requirements for postsecondary success become increasingly important to understand. State high school standards and tests should have some relationship to university success, given that close to two-thirds of American high school graduates go on directly to some form of postsecondary education. Most importantly, the skills students develop to do well on state assessments should bear some relationship to the knowledge and skills for university success.

Now that higher education faculty members have defined what they expect of freshmen enrolled in their entry-level courses and the states have developed their standards and assessments for high school students, to what degree do the two align? Standards for Success researchers have analyzed the assessments of 20 states to answer this question.

State assessments were analyzed by comparing individual assessment items to the Knowledge and Skills for University Success (KSUS) standards. Trained raters determined two things about each test item. First, did it correspond to one or more KSUS standard? Second, was the cognitive challenge of the test item less than, equal to or greater than the KSUS standard with which it was associated?

Results are reported in two formats. One illustrates the degree to which test items correspond with one or more of the KSUS standards and vice-versa. This is also known as Categorical Concurrence. The other format arrays information on the Depth of Knowledge, Range and Balance of items relative to KSUS. Depth of Knowledge is the rating each KSUS standard and each test item received on a five-point scale consisting of the following levels:

1. Retrieval
2. Comprehension
3. Analysis
4. Utilization
5. Goal setting and monitoring

Range gives an estimate of the breadth of expected knowledge addressed. This analysis refers to whether the content of the exam's items gives equal treatment to all KSUS items. Balance identifies the degree to which items cluster on a subset of KSUS standards. In other words, is each of the component parts treated with equal emphasis or are some aspects of the subject tested given more emphasis than others?

Depth of Knowledge, Range and Balance help identify the degree to which the state assessments align with university expectations. This information can help practitioners determine how much a state test helps prepare students for college. It can help admissions officers determine the degree to which a state test might provide information useful for admissions and placement purposes.

To view the entire set of state assessments that were analyzed, go to: http://www.s4s.org/alignment

Conclusion

The four components of the Standards for Success project are designed to help create a better connection between high school and university expectations. These tools can be utilized by states to establish more rational connections between high school and postsecondary education; by universities and colleges to review the expectation level present in their entry-level courses, as well as to make placement decisions, and perhaps eventually to be utilized in the admissions process; by high school teachers to ascertain the challenge level of their courses; and by students and parents to be more aware of the level of accomplishment necessary for college success. Such tools can help make the American educational system more efficient and effective and, over time, increase the number and range of students who are prepared for success in postsecondary education.

Future work for Standards for Success includes analyzing the knowledge and skills necessary for success in entry-level courses at state colleges and community colleges, working with states to help them align their high school standards and assessments with university success, and conducting pilot projects with high schools with large populations of students historically underrepresented in universities to determine the effects of raising academic expectations in classes in those high schools to a level consistent with the KSUS standards.

Resources

1. Visit the Standards for Success web site at www.s4s.org.

2. The Understanding University Success booklet is available by download at: http://s4s.org/03_viewproducts/ksus/index.php

3. Logon to the State High School Assessment database at: http://s4s.org/03_viewproducts/assessment/index.php

4. View the results of the Exam Alignment study at www.s4s.org/alignment

American Diploma Project[1]

Sheila Byrd, Ph.D.
The American Diploma Project; sponsored by Achieve, Inc., the National Alliance of Business, the Education Trust, Fordham Foundation

The high school diploma serves as a commonly valued currency, indicating a readiness to either begin credit-bearing coursework at a state postsecondary institution or to begin an entry-level job[2] in the workplace or in the military.

The purpose of the American Diploma Project (ADP) is to make American high school diplomas more consistently meaningful across states. The sponsors believe that the awarding of a high school diploma should signify that a student has mastered English language arts and mathematics knowledge and skills that align with the demands of postsecondary education and workplaces.

To accomplish this goal, ADP determined that performance on standards-based high school graduation assessments are important not only to the students who take them but also to the postsecondary institutions and employers who recruit high school graduates. Although we recognize that large scale assessments may not represent the full picture of a student's achievement, we also believe that requiring students to demonstrate proficiency on fair but rigorous standards-based assessments is a necessary first step towards making diplomas meaningful to all stakeholders.

Partner State Commitments

ADP therefore issued an RFP to all 50 states, asking applicants to demonstrate that their governors, chief state school officers, postsecondary and business leaders would agree to help define postsecondary and workplace expectations, participate in an analysis of their current standards and assessments, and work not only to align high school graduation standards with postsecondary and new economy expectations, but also to implement policies that would ensure rewards for students who mastered those expectations.

Fifteen states responded to the RFP, and when selected, our partner states agreed to develop plans to implement the following ADP goals:

- consider standards-based achievement in English language arts and mathematics as the essential core of partner states' high school diplomas
- consider standards-based high school assessment data as one criterion in higher education admissions and/or placement processes
- consider standards-based high school assessment data as one criterion in employer hiring processes

Each state will approach the attainment of these goals differently but all of our states are working to exemplify efforts to align their high school graduation requirements with real world needs, providing seamless transitions from high school to college, the workplace or the military. ADP partner state plans for meeting these goals will be announced at the ADP's fall 2003 National Forum.

ADP Benchmarks

Finally, building on information gleaned from our research and our work in the partner states, ADP is developing a new set of benchmarks in English language arts and mathematics that each state can use to analyze the quality and rigor of its current high school graduation standards and assessments, as our partner states will have done.

Research

To build a solid foundation for our work with partner states, ADP conducted the following research studies last year[3]:

- Definition of legal implications, which describes how states can minimize their legal risks as they seek to raise standards and implement rewards for achieving standards.
- Definition of postsecondary expectations in English language arts and mathematics (i.e., the knowledge and skills needed to begin credit-bearing coursework in state postsecondary institutions).
- Definition of workplace expectations for success in entry-level, high-growth, high-performance occupations (i.e., the knowledge and skills needed to begin the positions without the need for remediation).

The research has been used to inform the policy discussions in five states. By conducting analyses of partner state standards and assessments, and comparing those expectations to the expectations revealed in the research, we have been able to help partner states determine how to close any existing gaps over time, and help them move forward now with policy changes that will value performance against current standards—if aligned—or against refined future standards, aligned to ADP benchmarks.

In many states, only nominal P-16 entities had existed before the project was introduced in the state, and ADP has provided the impetus for critical cross-sector conversations. In some states, we helped establish new P-16 councils or other cross-sector "policy panels" with representation from K-12, postsecondary, business, labor, legislators and the military. The project's research has provided a solid foundation upon which states can build support for high standards in cases where support may have been wavering. Among the changes our states are implementing or planning to implement are:

- requiring a "college and workplace readiness" curriculum of all students
- using state standards-based test data for admissions, placement and financial aid decisions
- guaranteeing job interviews to students, using state standards-based test data

States are also conducting (or planning to conduct) studies to examine the performance of students beyond high school, vis-à-vis their standards-based assessment scores. In states where the research suggests refinements to the standards or assessments or both may be necessary (so that they will be useful to employers and postsecondary institutions), ADP is working with policymakers to plan for those adjustments.

Drafting and Circulation of ADP Benchmarks

The first draft ADP benchmarks (a synthesis of the preliminary workplace and postsecondary benchmarks developed during last year's research) is complete. This draft is currently being circulated in the partner states for comments and exemplification. These discussion groups comprise partner state employers, postsecondary educators and a variety of other folks (i.e., superintendents, local P-16 councils, parents). Employers and postsecondary faculty are also providing work samples and classroom assignments, designed to illustrate the "real world" applications of the benchmarks.

ADP established two Content Expert/Employer Panels (CEEPs), who are advising staff on how best to incorporate all the input we receive, offering their own insights as well. Based on these expected revisions, a second draft of the benchmarks will be circulated nationally this summer.

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National Forum To Convene

With the benchmarks finalized and partner state workplans for meeting ADP goals complete, ADP will host a national forum for similar state teams from all 50 states. At the forum partner states will disseminate information gleaned from their work to help others replicate these policies and practices in their own states, using the new benchmarks as a tool.

Potential Research Questions

1. Can performance on standards-based high school assessments predict success in the workplace, the military or at a state postsecondary institution?

2. Do students enrolled in rigorous "workplace and college readiness" curricula enjoy better success in the workplace, the military or at a state postsecondary institution?

Endnotes

1. Funded by a $ 2.4 million grant from The Hewlett Foundation, The American Diploma Project (ADP) was established in May, 2001, under the sponsorship of: Achieve, Inc., The Education Trust, The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and The National Alliance of Business.

2. For descriptions of these occupations and the research that produced these areas of concentration, please visit our website: www.americandiplomaproject.org

3. Each of these reports is available on our website: www.americandiplomaproject.org

Promoting Successful Transitions

to Productive Adulthood: The Example of Early College High Schools

Nancy Hoffman
Director,
Early College High School Initiative

Many factors—housing, health care, racial discrimination, labor market fluctuations, education, and luck—affect the prospects of low-income youth and youth of color in attaining the postsecondary credentials (e.g., technical certification, the AA or BA degree) that they need to succeed in today's economy. Since A Nation at Risk (1983), school reformers focused on achieving greater equity in outcomes through education have worked from the premise that we must demand more of all students and hold all schools accountable for results.

Early improvement efforts focused on elementary age students. During the past five years, the widespread use of high school exit assessments and the publication of results has focused attention on the knowledge and skills of our adolescents. Currently, many high school reform efforts seek to improve the transition from 8th to 9th grade to stem the dropout rate and give students a strong start for high school. A smaller number of reforms are focused on the next transition—to postsecondary education—recognizing that if the current education attainment levels persist, most of our youth will not complete a postsecondary credential, at a huge loss to themselves, our economy, and our democracy.

The secondary/postsecondary transition does not work well for underrepresented students for the following reasons:

- The comprehensive high school, our default institution, is designed for the traditional college-bound student.
- States and districts lack educational choices that meet varied developmental and economic needs of older adolescents.
- Misaligned and complex systems of transition from high school to postsecondary education shut out many older adolescents.
- The transition is lengthened—through remediation and repetition—rather than compressed for youth who need access to careers quickly.

Jobs for the Future, a national policy and research organization founded in 1983 and based in Boston, is a leader in connecting work and learning to improve education and career advancement opportunities for young people and adults. During the 1990s, JFF played a role in helping the field of "school to work" grow to national scale. JFF created a state consortium to design and test model state policies, helped the Clinton Administration shape the federal School To Work Opportunities Act of 1994, and worked

closely with a network of schools and communities that became the nucleus of the national school-to-career movement.

Much of JFF's recent youth work addresses the need for a range of options leading from the high school years through a postsecondary credential to a family-supporting wage by the age of 26. The Early College High School Initiative, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, with the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, fits within the youth cluster of Jobs for the Future. Cohort One of the Early College High School Initiative comprises seven intermediary organizations: Antioch Universitiy-Seattle, KnowledgeWorks Foundation, the Middle College National Consortium National Council of La Raza, SECME, the Utah Partnership Foundation, and the Woodrow Wilson Foundation. Together, these intermediaries are starting a total of 70 schools. A second cohort includes Portland Community College Prep and the California Community Colleges Foundation; other grants will be made in this cohort to start another 70-80 schools, many of them concentrated in single states and led by state-affiliated intermediary organizations.

Early College High Schools:

- Are small schools from which all students graduate with an Associate of Arts degree or sufficient college credits to enter a four-year, baccalaureate program as a college junior;
- Share the characteristics of effective small schools (e.g., personalized learning environments, a common and coherent focus, a maximum of 400 students per school, an emphasis on adult-student relationships);
- Reward mastery and competence with enrollment in college-level courses during high school; and
- Include the middle grades or outreach to middle schools to promote academic preparation and awareness of the Early College High School option.

A Successful Transition:
The Rationale for the Early College High School

The final years of high school and the first two years of postsecondary education constitute a developmental period that should launch students through their early adulthood into further education and work. Nonetheless, many students either drop out of high school or the first semesters of college. The problem is particularly acute for those who are low-income students, the first in their families to attend college, in the process of learning English, and students of color. In high school, many of these students take non-challenging, repetitious classes. Although they may meet high school exit standards and enter college, there is a substantial gap between those standards and the preparation needed to succeed in credit-generating college courses. Thus, the first semester of college can be particularly difficult. In addition, many high schools and postsecondary institutions lack the resources to provide sustained guidance and support to students.

For the last decade, educators and policymakers have been laying the groundwork for improving the transition to college by setting higher standards for high school exit and, recently, by attempting to ensure that students leave high school with content knowledge and critical literacy skills that are consistent with the entry requirements and academic demands of the first year of postsecondary education. Furthermore, many now agree that moving on to college should depend upon academic competence, not on accumulating credit hours. Nonetheless, the students for whom Early College High School is intended still face a confusing and sometimes daunting array of choices in attempting to enter postsecondary education.

The partners in the Early College High School Initiative believe that encountering the rigor, depth, and intensity of college work at an earlier age will inspire average, underachieving, and well-prepared high school students to work hard and stretch themselves intellectually. In addition, Early College High School will help remove financial and admissions barriers faced by many low-income students. These schools move several steps beyond aligning high school exit and college entrance standards. They are "existence proofs" or physical places where high school and college meet.

"Blended" Institutions:

New Schools Combining Secondary and Postsecondary Learning

In From the Margins to the Mainstream, an 18-month research project, JFF concluded that schools combining secondary and postsecondary learning had strong predictive power in regard to the attainment of a postsecondary credential. While these kinds of schools are few in number, they do have a history. The longest-lived blended institutions are middle colleges, which are high schools on or adjacent to community colleges. Students graduate with some college credits. At middle colleges, the "power of the site" is the key to eliciting adult behavior and serious learning from adolescents at risk of school failure. The 30 middle colleges in the Middle College High School National Consortium are explicitly designed to serve at-risk youth by improving the transition from high school to college and increasing motivation for rigorous academic work earlier in the student's school career.

In 1999-2000, of the 4,500 students enrolled in Consortium schools, 41 percent took college classes, with a 97 percent pass rate. The two best-known middle colleges, both located on the campus of LaGuardia Community College in New York City, have achieved excellent results with newcomers to the United States and with students facing severe challenges in completing high school.

The newest form of blended institution is the Early College High School. Four schools have a several-year history of working toward the Early College High School model: Portland Community College Prep in Portland, Oregon; Ocaloosa Walton Charter School in Niceville, Florida; Washtenaw Technical Middle College in Ann Arbor, Michigan; and Bard High School Early College in New York City. And within the Middle College Consortium, a number of schools are converting to Early College High Schools, including Middle College and International High Schools at La Guardia Community College, which began their programs in Fall '02.

Building on experience with the various options for earning college credit in high school, Early College High Schools have the potential to unify and reconceptualize academic work from ninth grade through the second year of college. Even during the first year of implementation, these schools have challenged the divided structure of our current secondary-postsecondary systems, raising issues about funding across jurisdictions, the awarding of credit, the credentialing of faculty, and the compatibility or lack thereof of accountability systems for high school and postsecondary education. They have also elicited considerable interest from state education policymakers in a time when the press for high achievement is colliding with economic restraint and creating a greater imperative for investments in human capital and the acceleration of young people into the labor market.

The Broader Agenda for Early College High School

If one argues from the work of developing models of new schools in states where there are specific funding, accountability, capacity, and governance issues to modify, then implementation of the Early College High School Initiative is a "power tool" for making change. In creating real, physical places where students earn both high school and college credits, sometimes simultaneously or out of the traditional developmental sequence, Early

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College High School challenges the status quo, exposes misalignment between systems, and calls on state leaders to decide if they support accelerated schools that provide youth with two free years of postsecondary education. Early College High Schools also make space for and promote broader access to the variety of opportunities for high school students to accelerate and earn college credits. In the past, these opportunities belonged almost exclusively to a privileged group of young people: those whose families could afford high-quality private high schools and those in well-funded public school districts that offer acceleration options to their highest achieving students. These include honors, Advanced Placement, and dual enrollment courses; International Baccalaureate programs, and other opportunities for acceleration.

The question then is the degree to which such opportunities will increase the number of young people gaining a college diploma or other postsecondary credential—especially students still underrepresented in higher education. The more specific question is whether policymakers and educational leaders will come to see AP, IB, and dual enrollment and their more radical "cousins"—middle and early colleges—as a force to motivate and challenge underrepresented students rather than solely to reward those who already are college-bound.

The Implications for Education and Policymakers

The ideas above about Early College High School, in particular, and college credit in high school, more generally, point in several directions. Most important is a need to gather more student demographic and achievement data to supplement the very tentative positive outcomes already reported: that dual enrollment students have higher postsecondary grades than those who had not been in dual enrollment programs, and that such students were retained at higher rates at the institutions in which they were dually enrolled.

A second area of research concerns equity of access to such programs. While underrepresented students are taking advantage of postsecondary options, the benefits are unevenly distributed. Students are shut out of participation by the lack of rigorous high school curricula, the lack of information about options for earning college credit, and, in some states, substantial fees.

A third area for policy analysis concerns the barriers to implementing educational options that cross borders between high school and college.

These ideas lead, in turn, to two major questions:

- Should there be an entitlement to education through the minimum required for success in today's world: an Associate's degree or two years of postsecondary education? In other words, if postsecondary credentials are required for the labor market, wouldn't it be smart to support students' full preparation for middle class jobs?

- Do we need new institutions designed to serve the needs of late adolescents, given that students in most states can now pass high school exit level exams in the tenth grade and that the college specialization begins the junior year and continues through a Master's degree? Such

institutions would look more like what is evolving in the European community: the end of general or technical education at age 19 followed by a three-year baccalaureate and a year-year masters.

- If we are serious about creating a seamless system at least through what now constitutes the first two years of postsecondary education, then the questions above are worth pondering.

Pathways to College Network

Terese Rainwater
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The mission of the Pathways to College Network is to focus research-based knowledge and resources on improving college preparation, access, and success for under-served populations, including low-income, underrepresented minority, and first-generation students. Through this mission, the Network expects to change perceptions, practices, and policies about academic preparation and college opportunity; eliminate policy and programmatic barriers to college going; and make readiness for college success a fundamental goal of public education in the United States.

Funding for Pathways comes from eight foundations, which include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Daniels Fund, Ford Foundation, GE Fund, James Irvine Foundation, KnowledgeWorks Foundation, Lumina Foundation for Education, and Lucent Technologies Foundation. The U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) and the National School-to-Work Office also provide financial support. The Education Resources Institute (TERI) in Boston administers the project in collaboration with Occidental College in Los Angeles.

Funds support collaborative activities of leading organizations and educational institutions that have been working independently to develop polices and practices to improve college opportunities for students. Fourteen organizations have come together with the funders to establish the Network, including the American Council on Education (ACE), ASPIRA, Inc., The College Board, the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE), the Education Commission of the States (ECS), The Education Resources Institute (TERI), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the National College Access Network (NCAN), the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP), the National Urban League, Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL), the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), the University of California System-EMP Collaborative, and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE).

ECS is one of four policy partners participating in the Pathways to College Network. The mission of the network is to focus research-based knowledge and resources on improving college preparation, access and success for underserved populations, including low-income, underrepresented minority and first-generation students. ECS is working with the College Board, the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education and the State Higher Education Executive Officers to organize P-16/access policy roundtables in states conduct P-16 case studies in five states and co-host four regional conferences.

State policy roundtables were held in Indiana, Montana, Tennessee, and Washington. ECS played a lead role in coordinating the roundtables in conjunction with a state partner agency, WICHE and the College Board. In addition, a regional policy forum for western states was held in Albuquerque, New Mexico in the fall of 2002. A Northeast/MidWest

Forum is planned for May 2003. Forums in the remaining regions will be scheduled throughout the summer and fall of 2003. A brief summary of each state's policy roundtable and the policy work achieved thus far is as follows:

Indiana

On August 13, 2002, Indiana's Education Roundtable co-sponsored a Pathways to College P-16 Policy Roundtable to examine strategies Indiana can undertake to improve and increase Indiana's "High Achieving Pipeline" to ensure student success in college and to examine ways to support classroom teachers in a rigorous academic standards and school accountability environment. The nearly 140 participants included representatives of P-12 systems, higher education, policymakers, business and community leaders.

Stan Jones, Commissioner for Higher Education, challenged roundtable participants with the following questions:

1. How do we increase the number of students taking and completing gateway academic courses?

2. How do we improve the quality of instruction in these courses?

At the end of the meeting, a spokesperson for each question reported to Governor Frank O'Bannon on the day's deliberations and the strategies identified to address each question. The recommended strategies will go before Indiana's Education Roundtable, which will determine "next steps."

Following the August 13th meeting, Indiana's Education Roundtable continued discussions regarding the strategies identified by the forum's participants. A draft "Action Plan" targeted at addressing these important P-16 issues was presented at the Education Roundtable meeting on November 12, 2002.

Montana

On August 13, 2002, Indiana's Education Roundtable co-sponsored a Pathways to College P-16 Policy Roundtable to examine strategies Indiana can undertake to improve and increase Indiana's "High Achieving Pipeline" to ensure student success in college and to examine ways to support

classroom teachers in a rigorous academic standards and school accountability environment. The nearly 140 participants included representatives of P-12 systems, higher education, policymakers, business and community leaders.

The major elements forming the backdrop for the Roundtable discussions in Montana include: (1) shrinking K-12 enrollments, (2) NAEP scores above national averages, (3) high graduation rates from high school, (4) low college going rates, (5) declining levels of state support for higher education, (6) fairly high college costs compared to income levels, (7) a preponderance of students enrolled in four-year colleges (71%), (8) little state investment in student financial aid, (9) low college completion rates, (10) a difficult state budget crisis and (11) a culture in which a significant portion of the population does not value a college education.

Tennessee

On October 10, 2001, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) co-sponsored a Pathways to College P-16 Policy Roundtable to examine the need for creating a statewide P-16 Council to address critical issues such as teacher education and curriculum alignment. Participants included 16 K-12, postsecondary, legislative and executive leaders.

By the end of the discussion, attendees agreed to form the core of an ongoing voluntary P-16 Council in Tennessee in conjunction with an existing committee of Tennessee Tomorrow (a non-profit business/education advocacy group in Tennessee). To build on this decision, THEC staff, using local data and background materials supplied by Pathways and SREB, prepared "The Case for P-16 Education in Tennessee," a five page summary of the benefits of a P-16 approach.

Following the Roundtable, THEC moved promptly to convene the first meeting of the P-16 Council on November 29, 2001. The Council determined immediately that "the focus of the Council must be on key P-16 improvement initiatives and not on a lack of funding." In addition, the State Board of Education and the Higher Education Commission are collaborating on a "Joint Report to focus on the priority areas for the P-16 initiative"

(quotes from the minutes of the November 29 meeting). The ongoing work of the P-16 Council will focus on ways to improve student learning and teaching quality.

Tennessee now has an operating, voluntary P-16 Council that is pursuing a clear agenda. This is a strong first step in moving Tennessee toward an integrated system of education that makes it easier for all students to improve their academic achievement and move easily from one level of education to the next.

Washington

On December 4, 2001, the Governor's Office, the Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) and the Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction (OSPI) co-sponsored a Pathways to College P-16 Policy Roundtable to create an understanding of P-16 education among state leaders and launch a dialogue leading to action focused on linkages across levels, easing transitions, and closing the achievement gap in Washington State. Participants included 158 K-12, postsecondary, legislative and executive leaders. (For an agenda, list of participants and program materials go to www.hecb.wa.gov, click on "Policy and Programs," then "P-16 Roundtable.")

The momentum generated at the meeting provided the impetus for the introduction of a governance bill that would have stimulated substantial debate on P-16 issues. Unfortunately, budget issues pushed this effort to the background and the bill died without a hearing. Governor Locke still has education governance, including a P-16 Council, on his policy agenda, and new recommendations are expected prior to the 2003 legislative session.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) has demonstrated its interest in building strong connections between the K-12 and higher education systems through its commitment to reviewing the minimum admission requirements for four-year colleges and universities. This examination will include a review of the balance between grades and standardized test scores, core course requirements, alternative admissions, community college transfers, competency-based admissions, discussion about using K-12 reform efforts in admissions and other topics.

HECB is also pushing the importance of completing a rigorous high school curriculum, a message delivered by several speakers at the December Pathways Roundtable.

In a possible precursor to a P-16 Council, an informal group from all sectors met throughout the spring and summer looking at ways to connect K-12 reform efforts to higher education. The group examined the use of the 10th grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) instrument in lieu of the placement tests at community colleges and/or as a supplement to, or in lieu of, the traditional standardized tests like the ACT or SAT for the public four-year colleges. Additional discussion about the use of portfolios in the college application process has been discussed.

Additional information on the Pathways to College Network can be found at: http://www.pathwaystocollege.net/

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